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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the key elements found in well-designed teachers' workspaces, including both classroom- and office-based workspaces; and highlights important development principles when designing these workspaces. Educational trends that have affected the rise of both classroom- and office-based workspace are briefly discussed. (GR)

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Teacher Workspaces

National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities

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Well-designed and -equipped teacher workspaces have the potential to enhance communication among teachers, promote an ethos of professionalism, and increase the effectiveness of teachers' efforts to plan and prepare lessons. Teacher workspaces can be as simple as a desk in a classroom or as elaborate as an office with cubicles, conference rooms, and social areas.

Educational Trends

Teacher workspaces can be differentiated between classroom- and office-based workspaces. Classroom-based workspaces traditionally consist of a teacher's desk, shelving, and storage. Office-based workspaces traditionally include individual planning spaces and a group work area. In additional, some teachers may have individual offices or share an office with another teacher.

Classroom-based workspace design is influenced by the trend toward more personalized instruction and the changing role of teachers. Learning is no longer seen as a passive activity where knowledge is simply transferred from the teacher to students. Instead, there is a strong movement toward more activity-based and project-centered work that has changed the role of the teacher from one who distributes knowledge to one who facilitates learning. Students have also been affected by this shift and may spend more time on individual and small group projects, producing a portfolio of work that ranges from drawings and essays to sculptures, videotapes, and free-standing displays.

Office-based workspace design is influenced by the move toward alternative school schedules and the professionalization of teaching. A large number of secondary schools now use alternative forms of scheduling—often called "block" or 4x4 plans—to allow for more effective use of time, space, and resources (Canady and Rettig 1995: 4–6). There was a time when an individual teacher used to "own" a classroom—both preparing and teaching lessons within the same classroom. Today, a classroom may be used by two or three teachers as they migrate between several classrooms in the course of one day. The office-based workspace, therefore, becomes a home base for many teachers who need a permanent place to plan and prepare. A similar concept applies to middle schools that have adopted a "house" plan. Here, teachers responsible for a particular group of students share a dedicated self-contained work area.

Research shows that shared workspaces can foster professional communities and promote networking and collaboration among teachers (Lieberman 1996: 51). This interaction, in turn, has been shown to positively affect students' academic achievement. Furthermore, areas dedicated for group use by teachers provide an opportunity to build cohesion both within and across disciplinary boundaries (Duke *et al* 1998: 166).

Key Elements of Teachers' Workspaces

It is important to note that classroom- and office-based workspace uses may overlap. Teachers may have a classroom-based workspace and make use of both the teachers' workroom and lounge. Alternatively, if teachers lack a permanent classroom, they should have an individualized workspace either in or adjacent to the teachers' workroom. In general, the square footage requirements for areas related to teachers' workspaces are:

Classroom-based workspace	
desk and storage space	100
Office-based workspace	
Private office	
without storage capacity	150
with storage capacity	300

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Office-based workspace, continued

Teachers' workroom	
main workroom area	200–400
teacher planning space/ workstation	50–75 each
breakout room	150
large conference room	300–400
Teachers' lounge	10–20 per faculty and administrative staff; 300 minimum
Faculty restrooms	120–180

Classroom-based workspace. Classroom-based workspaces should be designed for use by an individual teacher, as a shared space for several teachers, or as a temporary place for teachers who carry their materials with them. In general, a classroom-based teacher workspace should include wiring for an intercom/telephone and a computer. Controls for lighting and ventilation should be easily accessible, as should control panels for equipment, such as a closed-circuit television or projection system. Adequate storage should be provided in the forms of file cabinets, closets, and cupboards. Because teachers engage in a wide variety of activities that demand some level of privacy, storage spaces for teachers and students should be designated and clearly marked. One-on-one tutoring, parent meetings, collaborative curricular planning, computer-based work, personal tasks, phone discussions, reading and grading assignments, and reflection are all facilitated by a range of privacy-enhancing designs. The teacher workspace may have movable partitions. It should be away from high-use areas and, if possible, be located next to an external window. Moving the teacher's desk away from the front of the room permits greater flexibility in designing classroom space.

Office-based workspaces. Components of office-based teachers' workspaces generally include private offices; a teacher workroom with workstations, breakout room, and conference room; a lounge area; and restrooms.

- **Private office.** A private office is often necessary for Title 1 specialists, speech pathologists, and special education teachers. It may also be used as a departmental center or as a common office connecting similar-use classrooms. Because private office spaces may serve as a resource and storage center for some teachers, they should contain adequate storage (particularly for department heads who are often responsible for the department's textbooks) and be wired to accommodate phone, computer, intercom, and cable technology. Private office space may be used for one-on-one meetings and consultations (with students, parents, administrators, and other teachers) and should provide adequate privacy, comfort, and space to facilitate such interactions. Additional space and technology may be necessary to conduct learning activities and tutorials if the office is used for student "pull-out" programs, such as reading or math enrichment.
- **Teacher workrooms.** Teacher workrooms should serve as a focal point for teams or clusters (elementary and middle schools) and departmental or interdepartmental units (high school). These workspaces can be placed at the hub of a cluster of classrooms, adjacent to classrooms sharing a common space, or overlooking a high-use area—such as restrooms or student commons—for added supervision. Electrical wiring and spatial configurations should accommodate multiple phone lines, a copy machine, typewriters, computers and printers, a fax machine, intercom, worktable, and specialized equipment (e.g., a laminator). Teachers workrooms should also have mechanical ventilation to remove chemicals and fumes produced by materials and equipment. Ample open shelving and lockable cabinets should be furnished.

Individual workstations or planning space should be placed either at the periphery of the workroom or directly adjacent to it. It is important for individual teachers to have a permanent base from which to plan, reflect, and make preparations. An alternative to individual spaces may be combined or shared planning spaces. Shared spaces for four to six teachers can promote flexibility and increase spatial efficiency.

The teacher workroom should be adjacent to a conference room or breakout rooms. Activities within such rooms may include one-on-one consultations, small group brainstorming sessions, committee meetings, and faculty meetings. Both rooms should have whiteboards and bulletin boards and be able to accommodate multimedia and video presentations.

- **Teachers' lounge.** The teachers' lounge may be part of the teacher workspace, adjacent to the teacher workspace, or deliberately placed in a less trafficked area to promote a more relaxed atmosphere. More than one lounge/teacher workroom may be needed depending on the size of the school. The lounge should have a kitchenette with a microwave and two refrigerators, comfortable furniture, a phone in a quiet spot, and a television with cable access. A dishwasher and vending machine are also useful. Windows or access to the outside also foster a restful environment.
- **Faculty restrooms.** Faculty-only restrooms should be located adjacent to each teacher workroom. The male to female ratio of the faculty should be considered when designing the number and size of restroom facilities.

Principles of Teacher Workspace Design

Teacher workspaces should be seen as a critical element in the success of the academic program of the school. Without adequate space, teacher preparation and innovation may be negatively affected. When designing teacher workspaces:

- consult all teachers regarding their needs before completing the design of a school. Teachers may want very different forms of spaces depending on the type of curriculum being implemented.
- consider additional purposes—such as promoting interdisciplinary planning—that can be served by group workspaces. The importance of a strategically located space that facilitates cross-disciplinary interaction cannot be overestimated. Discussion of curricular issues, student progress, and school goals are all enhanced by a well-placed workspace.
- consider the benefits of locating group offices in areas where teachers can monitor unsupervised student activity (i.e., across from restrooms or stairwells).
- balance the needs of privacy and collaboration. Teachers need privacy, time to reflect, and space to conduct personal and school tasks. The need for privacy, though, should not override a teacher's connection to the department or school. Designing individual spaces in close proximity or adjacent to the main workroom or lounge area promotes easier interaction among faculty.

The teachers' lounge that serves as a place in which to relax with coffee and exchange gossip is being transformed into an office-type setting. Spaces for reflection, research, and collaboration have become necessary as teachers become more professional and increasingly share their classrooms with colleagues. Teacher workspaces encourage sustained planning and preparation time, facilitate interaction and collaboration among teams and departments, and foster the perception of a professional community across and within grade levels.

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Additional Information

See the NCEF annotated bibliography *Teacher Workspaces*, online at *http://www.edfacilities.org/ir/hottopics.cfm*.

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